



# News Release

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## **Health officials urge pertussis vaccination for adults and teens to protect infants**

*Whooping cough cases showing up around the state*

**OLYMPIA** — While Washington’s overall number of reported whooping cough (pertussis) cases remains even with last year, we’re seeing more activity in the past few months. Most concerning is the number of kids under one year who are hospitalized or have died from the preventable disease.

This year at least 44 infants in our state have had whooping cough — 18 of them under three months of age have been hospitalized and two died. Most have become ill since the beginning of summer. Young children should get four doses of vaccine between two and 18 months of age — each dose provides more protection. Babies under two months are too young to get the pertussis vaccine, so it’s important for parents and others in close contact to “cocoon” babies by getting immunized themselves.

“Immunizations aren’t just for kids,” said State Health Officer and pediatrician Dr. Maxine Hayes. “Whooping cough vaccine protects teens and adults, and by getting it they help protect infants who are too young to be vaccinated, but have the greatest risk of serious complications, including death.”

The whooping cough vaccine (Tdap), for adolescents and adults through age 64, became available in 2005. It’s the first vaccine for older people that protects against whooping cough, along with tetanus and diphtheria. Most people got a series of whooping cough vaccines when they were kids, but protection wears off over time. The Department of Health recommends people substitute a Tdap vaccine for a routine tetanus (Td) booster, which is needed every 10 years. People should get it sooner if they’re in close contact with young kids or live in an area with an outbreak. Because this is a new vaccine, adults and teens shouldn’t assume they’re protected even if they’ve gotten a recent tetanus booster. They should ask their health care provider if they’ve had the Tdap vaccine.

[Pertussis](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis/) ([www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis/](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis/)) is highly contagious and spreads easily through coughing and sneezing. Initial symptoms are similar to the common cold — sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. Within two weeks, the cough may become severe and can develop into coughing spells followed by a high-pitched whoop in some people. An infected person can spread the disease from the beginning of the cold-like symptoms to three weeks after the coughing episodes start. Antibiotics can reduce the contagious period.

The disease symptoms are milder in adults, who may not even realize they have it. People who have or may have pertussis should stay away from babies, young children, and pregnant women until treated.

“It’s important for adults to find out if they’ve had the vaccine,” said Dr. Hayes. “Back-to-school time is a great opportunity since parents are already thinking about vaccines for their kids.”

More information on preventing whooping cough is available by contacting your [local health agency](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm)) or the Department of Health’s [immunization program](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize)) at 360-236-3595.

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